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# Brezhnev's Need For a SALT Agreement

Although U.S. negotiators always seem the desperately anxious suitors, top Kremlinologists here believe Soviet party boss Leonid Brezhnev needs political help at home from a new arms limitation agreement far more than does President Ford.

The U.S. drive for agreement is based not only on defense budget pressures but also on Mr. Ford's quest for election-year accomplishment and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's desire to climax his detente diplomacy. But these factors, Kremlinologists believe, are dwarfed by Russian needs: economic crisis in the Soviet Union that may reduce present massive defense spending.

Soviet hunger for SALT (strategic arms limitation talks) puts an ironic cast on last week's talks in Moscow. Hard-liners in Congress and the Pentagon believe Dr. Kissinger arrived there with an official position that gave away too much and fear he went further in bargaining.

Brezhnev goes before the Communist Party Congress Feb. 24 with the worst record of economic achievement since the early days of World War II, when German invaders ravaged the country. The five-year plan nearing its end is the first since the German invasion that has not met principal economic goals. The shortfall has been worst in grain production, forcing the Kremlin into the world grain market for unprecedented purchases from the capitalist West.

With the price of gold now \$50 an ounce below the spectacular high of a year ago, the Soviet government is loath to raise money today by substantial sales from its board of gold.

That means insufficient feed grains for promised fattening of beef cattle and other meat animals. Likewise, output of consumer goods is lagging far behind original schedules. Result: The long promised availability of consumer goods has once again proved illusory.

Thus, some Kremlinologists here are convinced the economic shortfall is about to trigger a major internal battle over the level of Soviet defense spending in the next five-year plan. Their conclusion: defense spending will be forced downward simply because financing at present levels will not be available, with money drying up because of foreign purchase of grain.

Perhaps more damaging to Brezhnev's reputation high in the Communist Party are shortfalls in his foreign policy. He never has been able to convey a Europe-wide parley of Communist par-

ties; party leaders in Yugoslavia, France, Italy and possibly other countries have refused to toe the Brezhnev mark.

Similarly, the European Security Conference finally held in Helsinki last summer has fallen far short of being the significant Soviet triumph it was touted to be. Nor has Brezhnev made progress with the West—particularly the U.S.—in thinning out European force levels.

Believing, therefore, that Soviet military spending will have to go down anyway, hard-liners in Washington question why the President and his Secretary of State have pushed so insistently for a new SALT agreement.

The answer lies in Mr. Ford's political needs and Dr. Kissinger's desires to complete his diplomatic grand design.

Continuing failure of the White House to solve a special employment problem that is politically acute in Maine—that of former Gov. John Reed—now threatens the resignation of Harrison Richardson as chairman of the President Ford Committee in Maine.

Reed is being dropped as chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board in favor of Webster Todd Jr., son of a

longtime Republican power and present state chairman in New Jersey. Reed is widely regarded as competent, intelligent and industrious. What's more important politically, as the only prominent Maine Republican to hold a job in the Ford administration, he is a highly visible symbol to his party back home.

Hence, the bitterness of Richardson and other leading Maine Republicans, including state party chairman John Linnell. Richardson and Linnell have both warned Mr. Ford's national campaign chairman, Howard Callaway, of dire repercussions if no job is found for Reed.

This reflects the random impact of campaign politics at the Ford White House. While campaign considerations are clear in some nominations, the President seems oblivious of political reality in handling appointments from some battleground states—such as Maine, where he faces a battle in precinct caucuses beginning Feb. 1.

A footnote: Adding insult to injury was the decision two weeks ago by Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz to hire Maynard Dolloff, former Maine agriculture commissioner (and defeated gubernatorial opponent of Reed in 1962), as a top consultant. Dolloff is one of the state's leading Democrats.

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